

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers

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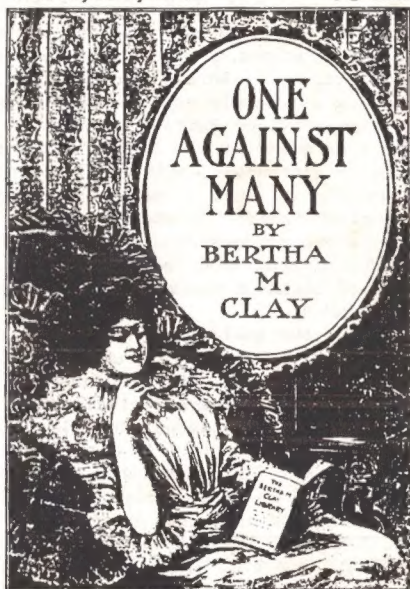
Whole Number 601

THOMSON BURTIS' REX LEE AVIATION STORIES

By David K. Vaughan

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Publisher: Street & Smith, New York, NY. Issues: 512. Dates: Jan. 29, 1900, to Jan., 1917. Schedule: 1-41 Weekly, 42-82 Semi-weekly, 83-237 Weekly, 238-270 Monthly, 271-512 Semi-monthly. Pages: 200 to 300. Size: 7 1/8 x ". Price: 10 cents. Illustration: Pictorial colored cover usually of a young lady. Contents: Romances by many authors under the name of Bertha M. Clay. Many reprinted from serials appearing earlier in New York Weekly. (NOTE: We have resumed sketches of American paperback publications which are akin to dime novels. Publications of Street & Smith will be featured until all have been covered.

THOMSON BURTIS' REX LEE AVIATION STORIES*

By David K. Vaughan

Thomson Burtis was the author of four series of popular aviation adventure books of the 1920s and 30s, including the Russ Farrell series, the Slim Evans series, four volumes in the Air Combat series, and the Rex Lee series. Burtis is probably best known today for his 11-volume Rex Lee series, at least according to the general availability of Rex Lee books to be found in the juvenile section of used book stores around the country.

Marked with their distinctive U. S. Air Service insignia—the red ball in a white star in a blue field—on the spine of their colorful dust jackets, bound in an olive drab cloth binding, the Rex Lee books are literally stamped with an authentic Army flavor. A casual reading of any of the eleven volumes would convince the reader that Burtis knew something about airplanes, for every volume contains realistic, knowledgeable, and action-packed accounts of Army airplanes in operation.

According to a brief biographical account found on the dust jackets, Burtis was "a former Army aviator" who had also worked as a "postal clerk, hobo, actor, writer, mutton-chop salesman, preacher, roughneck in the oil fields, newspaper man, flyer, scenario writer in Hollywood, and Synthetic clown with the Sell-Floto circus." Burtis' familiarity with the circus, oil fields, and film-making is clearly evident in the Rex Lee books.

The dust jacket also provides Burtis' summary of his career as an Army flier: "During my five years in the Army I performed pretty nearly every sort of flying duty—instructor, test pilot, bombing, photographic pilot, etc., in every variety of ships from tiny scout planes to the gigantic three-motored Italian Caproni [bomber]." Burtis apparently lived as he flew, cramming numerous professional activities into a relatively short period of time. Burtis must also have written as he lived, for he produced a large number of books—a minimum of 26, and probably more—in a nine year period from 1924 to 1932.

As might be imagined, the quality of writing in his books varies noticeably. But if the literary quality is uneven, the energy level is consistently high, and the aerial episodes are invariably exciting. Action was Burtis' strong suit; subtle characterization and suspenseful plot development, however, are generally missing from his works.

Thomson Burtis was, in fact, a pilot in the United States Army. The *Air Service Newsletter*, which was first published every two weeks starting at the end of World War I, gives some insight into Air Service flying activities and even mentions Thomson Burtis on occasion. An early mention of his name occurs in February, 1920, when he is listed as one of the pilots in a formation flight honoring General Pershing, who visited Kelly Field, near San Antonio, Texas, during the middle of the month. On April 20 of that year he is described as having experienced a forced landing in a DeHaviland DH-4, also at Kelly Field. On August 21, 1920, he is listed as having reported to Godman Field, near Louisville, Kentucky; his commanding officer is listed as Captain George Kenney, who was credited with the destruction of three German aircraft during World War I, and who later commanded the 5th Air Forces in the Pacific theatre during World War II. At this time Burtis is listed as the squadron engineering (or maintenance)

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officer. It seems likely that Burtis flew to a number of other airfields in the area, including McCook Field at Dayton, Ohio, at that time the Air Service's primary test flying facility.

On September 17, 1920, Burtis is listed as having been appointed a Second Lieutenant in the regular Army, a significant advancement from his reserve status, especially considering that the Army had suffered severe cutbacks in manpower after World War I. A regular commission was offered only to especially deserving and promising officers. Yet three years later, apparently, Burtis resigned that commission and left the service. The same issue of the *Air Service Newsletter* gives Thomson Burtis' full name—Henry Thomson Burtis—and it also records the fact that Burtis and fellow pilot George Kenney experienced engine failure in flight and made a forced landing seven miles east of Rantoul, Illinois; according to the account, the crankshaft of their Liberty engine—the power source of the DeHaviland DH-4—broke. The final entry naming Thomson Burtis is dated March 11, 1921, when he is described as accompanying the remains of a fellow pilot named Lawson, who died in an aircraft accident, to Hartford, Connecticut.

Because Burtis says that he flew in the Air Service for five years, because he apparently did not fly in combat during World War I, and because his first published stories appeared in 1924, it seems likely that his five year period of service began in 1918 and ended in 1923. He may well have been in training in the United States when the war in Europe ended. There was apparently little delay between the time his flying service ended and his writing career began. Burtis may well have begun serious writing efforts before he left the service. Certainly the primary subject of the bulk of his writing was the Air Service flying experience, for his protagonists typically are ex-service flyers.

The initial stories that Burtis published were the Russ Farrell stories, which appeared in story form in *American Boy* magazine from 1924 through 1931 before they appeared in book form. The first volume in the series, *RUSS FARRELL, AIRMAN* (1924), very likely traces Burtis' career, as the action of the stories takes place primarily in Texas, Ohio, and West Virginia. The stories describe flying training in Texas, flying border patrol along the Texas-Mexico border, and flying in the Ohio-Kentucky-West Virginia area. Later volumes describe test flying activities at Dayton, Ohio (*TEST PILOT*, 1926); air circus flying activities (*CIRCUS FLYER*, 1927); border patrol duties along the Texas-Mexico border (*BORDER PATROLMAN*, 1927); and secret service activities in Mexico against bandits who are hijacking oil company payrolls (*OVER MEXICO*, 1929). Burtis returns repeatedly to these locales and story lines in the Rex Lee books. By 1928 Burtis had undertaken a new series, the Rex Lee series, when the first three volumes appeared; the next three volumes of the Rex Lee series appeared in 1929. The third trio of Rex Lee books appeared in 1930, and two more books followed, one in 1931 and one in 1932.

As in the Russ Farrell series, the young male protagonist is a product of the U. S. Air Service, although in this series Lee is only casually associated with the Air Service. Of eleven books in the series, Lee is described as being in the service in three and a half of them. Towards the end of the series, Burtis moves Lee in and out of service affiliation with little explanation. More often than not Lee is assisted by other ex-service friends, and when he is in the Air Service, he occasionally encounters some individuals who appear in the Russ Farrell series, including Lieutenant Slim Evans (later to be featured in his own brief two-volume series), General Mallory (a thinly-disguised version of General Billy Mitchell), and Captain Kennard (a thinly-disguised version of Captain George Kenney). The fact that Kennard and other Air Service char-

acters appear repeatedly in the Burtis books suggests a special affection he must have felt for the people with whom he worked in the Air Service.

In general, Burtis' pattern in the Rex Lee books seems to have been to write two novels and one collection of stories in each of the primary years of publication (1928, 1929, and 1930), and to rotate the scene of the action among his three favorite locations: south Texas (especially the Texas-Mexico border); the West Virginia-Ohio-Kentucky area; and the southern California-Nevada area. In the Texas locations the plot usually involves aerial smuggling activities across the Mexican border (with some oil field activities thrown in for good measure). In the West Virginia-Ohio area, the plot typically involves circus activities and organized groups of thieves. The southern California stories generally feature air mail hijackings and movie-making. In every Rex Lee story, there are two or three villains involved in illegal money-making schemes, which Rex Lee helps to break up through the use of his aerial skill. If the plots are predictable, the characters wooden, and the dialogue occasionally excessive, the flying scenes are always exciting (though Burtis occasionally repeats the same stunts and flying sequences).

Like other male protagonists in the Burtis books, Rex Lee is tall (six feet) and slender. In *NIGHT FLYER*, the midpoint book in the series, he is described further as being constituted of a mixture of bravado and idealism, qualities displayed when the Rex Lee stories are at their best:

There have been many famous flyers in the history of the American air service and among them the name of Rex Lee will always stand high. To a natural aptitude for the air—judgment of speed and distance and instinctive handling of his ship—there was added a consuming love for and zest in the game. Love of adventure for its own sake had always been his, but somehow the air seemed to hold all the ingredients of paradise within itself for him. Added to his enjoyment of its perils and emergencies was a fundamental enthusiasm for it and a belief in its future. It was business and pleasure and adventure and almost life itself to him. It was that utter immersion in it which was responsible for every step of his career since the days before when he had gone to Donovan Field [Kelly Field] to learn to fly, a gangling youngster in his teens. (NIGHT FLYER, 61-62)

Burtis' skill in depicting flying activities is illustrated in this account, found in *MYSTERIOUS FLIGHT*, in which he describes the complexities of a takeoff of the Martin Bomber, a late 1920s Air Service multi-engine aircraft:

With a tremendous roar the Martin sprang to life. Rex set himself against the wheel with all his strength to get the tail up. As soon as that effort was over the Martin became suddenly easy to handle. It took the air in but a trifle longer run than a DeHavilland.... Being seated ahead of the propellers, that terrific air blast which swirls back ... was not in evidence. The propellers whirled around with their tips less than a foot from the heads of the airmen.

As soon as he had cleared the last obstacle and had started to circle the field Rex synchronized the motors until both were turning exactly fourteen-fifty [rpm]. He studied gauges and adjusted shutters to hold the [engine] temperature steady....

It handled with paradoxical ease—a baby could have spun the wheel or worked the rudders. Only a slight logginess when compared with smaller ships would make a pilot notice what a big ship he was flying....

The wings stretched solidly to either side, totaling over seventy feet. Struts, upright and cross, were like the limbs of some great tree. Four feet to either side of the cockpit, resting on the lower wing amid a maze of struts and braces, the Liberties [engines] sang their drumming tune. (MYSTERIOUS FLIGHT, 47-48)

The first of Burtis' 1928 books, GYPSY FLYER, is a collection of seven stories, similar in spirit to the Russ Farrell stories, describing fire patrol, air mail flying, seaplane activities, and a lead-off story that is a retelling of the 1927 Lindbergh flight. The second volume, BORDER PATROL, is the first fully-developed novel in the series, and is one of the more successful volumes in the series, in which Rex Lee breaks up an aerial smuggling operation. The third 1928 volume, RANGER OF THE SKY, is set in West Virginia, as Lee and his ex-service friend Tom Service uncover an organized crime ring which is using a circus as a front.

The first 1929 book, SKY TRAILER, is another novel set in West Virginia. In this story a dishonest sheriff attempts to overturn an aerial taxi service run by another of Rex Lee's ex-service buddies. The second 1929 volume, ACE OF THE AIR MAIL, consists of two separate stories describing air mail hijacking attempts along the California-Nevada border. In the third 1929 volume, NIGHT FLYER, the action again returns to southern Texas, as Lee thwarts a smuggling ring while simultaneously helping to clean up an oil boom town.

In the first 1930 volume, MYSTERIOUS FLIGHT, Lee is back in the Air Service for a two-story sequence of West Virginia flying, the first involving the breakup of a robber's hideout on a mountain top, the second describing the complications that occur when Lee's Air Service squadron inadvertently causes friction in a West Virginia community during a recruiting visit. This story is one of the best in the series, because it is an excellent account of the activities, personalities, and tensions that could really exist in an Air Service squadron operating in peacetime. The second 1930 volume, ROUGH RIDERS OF THE AIR, takes Lee back to southern Texas, where, as part of the Air Service squadron, he again foils a smuggling ring which is linked to a circus. The third 1930 volume, AERIAL ACROBAT, is Burtis' longest novel in the series—279 pages—and is a fully-developed account of circus life. Although Burtis includes aspects of circus and carnival life in other books, AERIAL ACROBAT is his "circus novel," full of accurate anecdotes and factual description that could come only from someone who worked in and observed the activities of a circus over a long period of time. Although the plot is as usual a bit contrived—one of the owners wants to wreck the circus—the book may be the closest Burtis ever comes to producing a culturally and literarily valuable document. It should be added as a footnote, however, that the book contains descriptions of black characters and black speech patterns that may offend modern readers.

It seems as if the 1930 volumes used up the best materials in the Rex Lee storehouse, for the final two volumes in the series—the 1931 TRAILING AIR BANDITS and the 1932 FLYING DETECTIVE—lack the better qualities of the earlier books. In the 1931 novel, TRAILING AIR BANDITS, Lee is once more in southern Texas, where oil wells and movie-making are mixed in with aerial smuggling. The final volume in the series, FLYING DETECTIVE, consists of five stories whose locale ranges from southern Texas to southern California. The plots of these stories focus on the usual border smuggling adventures, but they lack the excitement of earlier stories. Burtis seems to have been cleaning out his Rex Lee file before moving on to other projects. Burtis was in fact working on another project by this

time—the four-volume Air Combat books (DARE DEVILS OF THE AIR, FOUR ACES, WING FOR WING, FLYING BLACK BIRDS), all featuring the World War I flying combat he missed out on, and all published in 1932.

Burtis' works display the characteristics of all works written by writers who wrote much and who wrote quickly—a casual style, lack of plot development, lack of complex character development, repetitious story lines—characteristics shared with writers in the dime novel tradition. Burtis acknowledges that heritage in the Rex Lee books. In NIGHT FLYER (1929), one of the characters, after listening to Rex Lee map out a plan of attack, says;

"Gosh; I'm feelin' like a combination of Sherlock Holmes, the Pinkertons and—"

"Old Sleuth, the terror of the nickel novels," grinned Lee.

(36)

In ROUGH RIDER OF THE AIR (1930), another character shares his "dime novel deliberations" with Rex Lee (79). In acknowledging his heritage, Burtis partly disarms criticism of his literary techniques.

If Burtis develops anything like a refined literary technique, it appears in a certain aspect of his depiction of character, for in his 1930 and 1931 volumes, his characters become more complex; it is not immediately evident which characters are really the villains, for instance, and even some of the villains demonstrate capacities for change. It is clear also that Burtis has a real gift for describing the appearances and behaviors of people he has observed; his accounts of circus workers, of West Virginia rural dwellers, of certain oil field workers, and above all, of Air Service aircrew members are accurate and convincing. Burtis is most effective as a story-teller when he describes the daily workings of an Air Service squadron. When he attempts to create a story that wanders far afield of Air Service experience, he seems to lose control of his greatest strength, believable action sequences. Burtis' greatest contribution may be as an unofficial Air Service historian, as a recorder of the daily interactions of Air Service squadron members.

Burtis' interests were bound to change as his Air Service experiences grew more and more distant, however much they were necessary as the basis of his writing. From 1928 through 1932 Burtis was phenomenally productive, publishing over 22 books of juvenile and adult fiction, including eight books in 1932 alone. After 1932, however, Burtis practically ceased writing, for almost no more of his works can be found. The single piece of his writing published after 1932 that I have been able to locate is a short story in the November, 1940, issue of the pulp magazine *Sky Fighters*; and I have also seen a reference to another Burtis short story in the June, 1941, issue of the same publication. It may be that Burtis had earned enough from his writings to retire from the writing business. It may also be that the development of new aircraft, of a new and different war, and of a newer and larger military flying organization—the Army Air Corps—had deprived him of his one best topic—the men and activities of the U. S. Air Service.

* * * * *

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BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THOMSON BURTIS' REX LEE FLYING STORIES

| TITLE | DATE | TYPE | LOCATION | ARTIST |
|------------------------|------|-----------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| GYPSY FLYER | 1928 | 7 stories | Coast to coast | Wendell Galloway/unk |
| BORDER PATROL | 1928 | Novel | Texas | " /PS |
| RANGER OF THE SKY | 1928 | Novel | West Virginia | " /PS |
| SKY TRAILER | 1929 | Novel | West Virginia | " /PS |
| ACE OF THE AIR MAIL | 1929 | 2 stories | California | Barrett Alexander /unk(PS) |
| NIGHT FLYER | 1929 | Novel | Texas | B.B.Alexander |
| MYSTERIOUS FLIGHT | 1930 | 2 stories | West Virginia | " |
| ROUGH RIDER OF THE AIR | 1930 | Novel | Texas | " |
| AERIAL ACROBAT | 1930 | Novel | Ohio | " |
| TRAILING AIR BANDITS | 1931 | Novel | Texas | " |
| FLYING DETECTIVE | 1932 | 5 stories | California | unk/unk |
| * | * | * | * | * |

THE AMERICAN COUNTESS: OR; MARRYING A TITLE.
THE MYTHS & REALITIES*

By Arlene Moore

America's flirtation with British and European aristocracy has enjoyed a long, and at times, a fruitful relationship. At least twice in this century we have seen American women raised to the highest state of the peerage. Princess Grace of Monaco was the most successful for she managed to secure for herself a crown. Wallis Simpson, on the other hand, was not so fortunate for she married a king and lost him his throne.

According to Elizabeth Eliot, in *HEIRESSES AND CORONETS*, this flirtation actually had two phases. The first occurred in the late 18th century and early 19th between American heiresses and members of the European and English nobility. For instance, in 1798, Betsy Patterson married Jerome Bonaparte, a nephew of Napoleon I. In the same time frame, Anne Louisa Bingham married Alexander Baring, later Lord Ashburton. In 1799 Frances Cadwalader married the future Lord Erskine. And finally, the three Caton sisters, who were granddaughters of Charles Carroll of Carrolstown, made extremely advantageous marriages during this same period. One married the Marquis of Caermarthen, afterwards the Duke of Leeds. Another married Baron Stafford, and the third, became the second wife of Richard Colley, the Marquis of Wellesley.

Ms. Eliot believed that such marriages occurred because the colonial society still was composed of people who were essentially European in thought and philosophy. Their common beliefs were identical and the concept of a National identity had yet to become a factor. In this case, American women had a distinct advantage over their counterparts in England and Europe for they were much better educated and were considered extremely attractive with sparkling personalities.¹

It would be another seventy years before the second wave of American

*Paper presented at ACA conference, April, 1989, at St. Louis, MO.

heiresses took their place as titled ladies. It began when Jenny Jerome married Randolph Churchill, a younger son of the Duke of Marlborough in the mid 1870s. This marriage would be followed in two years by the marriage of Consuelo Iznage to Viscount Manderville, the heir to the Duke of Manchester. From then, the tide became a flood that continued well into the 20th century. It also began the second phase of the American fascination with nobility and titles. There was a difference, however. These marriages were between two distinct political and social groups of people. We were now Americans with very different philosophies and beliefs. This time, there would be definite clashes of culture as well as a certain sense of affinity on both sides of the ocean. It should be noted that several other advantageous marriages occurred prior to 1874 but for some reason they did not have the tremendous effect the Churchill wedding had.

An article in the July, 1899, *Cosmopolitan*, by Mrs. Frances DeForest noted the current view of American women. She wrote, "Most of the women who marry noblemen have wealth and beauty, of which, augmented by the gifts of rare brilliancy and intellect make up a combination so tempting that the scions of noble houses can but feel proud to exchange their titles for so much that is charming and lovely."²

These marriages also brought about a new plotting convention for romantic fiction—that is—marrying a title! In fact, this plotting device has not been exhausted since its first appearance. Within the last few years, Barbara Cartland, Marion Chesney, and several other writers, have all successfully used it and have written very entertaining and creatively plotted novels,—not great novels, but outstanding examples of good escape fiction at its best.

Before continuing, certain elements of this type of plot should be identified. The heiress is usually beautiful and has uncounted millions in money, or close to it. She is often retiring, sheltered, or quiet. She may or may not be beautiful. If not, she has other elements of character that seems to eventually make her appear so to the hero. The nobleman is usually poor, at least by his standards, handsome, and arrogant. The key element in these plots is the concept of a "forced marriage." He is desperate for money, either because his father lost it by gambling or by unwise investments, or the hero has lost it by acting the part of the perennial playboy.

The heroine's family, is desperate for social advancement via a title. Resentment can be, and often is, central to the conflict between the hero and heroine. Not only does this conflict have to be resolved between them, but also conflicts with his family and society have to be dealt with. A central issue is the fact that the hero has "blue blood." He "owes" his family, his name, and his title something more than a person with money to be the mother of the future generation. While it may have been perfectly acceptable for Great Uncle Ned to mend his and the family's fortunes by marrying an English bride with money from the upper middle classes, the present day heir is much too good to do such a thing. Consequently, readers see him pulled kicking and screaming in his typically British stiff upper lip fashion to the altar. The heroine, on the other hand, may or may not want the marriage. In some cases, she simply does not know how or why she has been so lucky or so unfortunate to attract his attention. Innocence, simplicity, naivety all conspire against her so that she only slowly comes to realize that she is not the object of his love, but instead, it is her fortune. Typically, she reacts in a noble, philosophical manner. She knows how to behave! She knows how to meet the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." At this point, the hero finally sees the error of his ways and must then continue for many more pages and perilous

events to show his real love for his wife, admitting finally that she is the one who is so far above him.

The following titles are among the earlier ones published that used this new plot conflict. *THE AMERICAN COUNTESS*, written in 1886, by Emma Garrison Jones,³ *THE AMERICAN DUCHESS*, in 1899, by Charlotte M. Kingsley,⁴ and finally, *THE AMERICAN INVADERS*, in 1902, by Thomas Hanshew.⁵ These all appeared in *The Family Story Paper* published by Norman Munro, and according to an editorial note would not be reprinted in book form. *THE AMERICAN COUNTESS* was slightly misleading with almost all of the events and actions taking place in this country. Thus family conflicts and situations of the heroine interacting with English society and her husband's family did not appear until the very end of the story. In spite of the title, this novel did not quite fit the fiction conventions for this type of story.

THE AMERICAN INVADERS, also, misses most of the elements for this type of conflict. What it does give is a typical example of "the barbaric American." Those uncouth, unwashed, and unbearable persons that one must cope with in English society. The plot centers on Cyrus P. Latimer, self-made millionaire; his sister, Miss Jo Bunker from Massachusetts, and two young girls in an English school. One is Mary Latimer, Cyrus's daughter; and the other is Molly, a niece of Cyrus and Jo. Cyrus and his family are to visit Sir John Sternforth, a friend whom he had saved from death years ago in Montana. The plot has several well hidden complications with everything ending with roses and weddings. It is the portrayal of Jo that makes this novel somewhat representative of another plot element used during this period. This element is that of the rustic, awkward American who is totally outside of society's notice. Certainly Hanshew concentrates on the rustic element in Jo's character as he has her say, "Great sadirons, Cyrus! it's puffedickly scandalous,...I never see the beat of it in all my mortal pilgrimage—never! Why that woman don't know no more about house-keepin' than a spavined mule. Look at all them dirty silk dusters a-hangin' from the ceiling and company expected too. And look at this floor and the, them stairs yonder. Not a blessed inch of carpet on'em! All been took up to be shook and left out in the backyard and forgot.... And what under the sun can a woman that sets up to be in her right senses want with a lot of tin dolls anyhow."⁶

There is no real conflict among the two families and the only one to voice a sense of offense and social snobbery is Sir Stenforth's wife, a character who is already leaving for greener pastures.

THE AMERICAN DUCHESS on the other hand, has more than enough mystery, murder, and arrogant nobles to meet the stated criteria. John Lorrimer is a moneylender who has a sweet, unspoiled daughter who is beautiful in appearance and in spirit. Her name is Crystal and is barely seventeen. She has been kept isolated from the coarseness of the world and has lived on tales of noble deeds and heroic knights, such as those of the House of Ulverford. Enter Harold, the Duke of Ulverford who owes Mr. Lorrimer one hundred & ten thousand dollars. Within a few weeks, Crystal is madly in love with him and he is furious with the charade he must carry out until after the wedding. The day they sail for England, Mr. Lorrimer conveniently dies of a heart ailment and Crystal is left to the mercy of Harold.

His family is even worse. They include his mother, the Duchess of Ulverford; his sisters Lady Viva and Lady Hilda, as well as a brother who is retarded and kept guarded in a tower. Harold is caught in a quandary. On one hand, he is fascinated by Crystal and almost in love with her. Yet, he reads things into her actions and her words, feeling that she is an accomplished actress determined to make a fool of him by forcing him to

fall in love with her.

A neighboring family provides Harold with an old love interest, that is Lady Grace Castlemaine. Her brother acts as Grace's accomplice when she sets out to compromise Crystal. The lines of battle are drawn even before Crystal arrives at the Ulverford estate. For all of Crystal's narrow upbringing, she holds her own when dealing with the jealous women. Events culminate in a double murder, false charges brought against Crystal, and an unexpected declaration of love from Harold. As expected, all ends with a kiss and a happy-ever-after for the two lovers, which is, naturally, a proper romantic ending.

What about reality, however? Did these across the ocean love stories have the same sort of ending? Usually, but depending....For instance, Miss May Fisher of New York married Count James D'Aramon and lived a very satisfying life in Paris. Miss Florence Audenried of Washington became the Countess de la Forest-Divonne and lived abroad where she was noted as a brilliant society figure. Miss Mattie Mitchell of Portland, Oregon, became the Duchess de la Rochefoucauld after a two year engagement. The notice mentioned that the marriage was a love match. These and many more heiresses are mentioned by Mrs. DeForest. She seems to take delight in showing such marriages as shining examples to her readers.⁷ However, not all heiresses were so fortunate. A clever outline on the book jacket of Mrs. Eliot's *HEIRESSES AND CORONETS* shows quite graphically the other side of the coin. For instance, Anna Gould with her fortune of \$15,000,000 married Count Boni de Castellane, only to have him spend her money on other women. If that were not enough, he struck and abused her as well. Helen Morton fared not much better. She married the Duc de Valeccay with \$6,000,000 as her dowry. He insulted her right after the wedding and later deserted her. Equally unhappy was Ella Haggin with a dowry of \$5,000,000. She married Count Festeils De Toina, who took her among cannibals and left her with them.⁸

Of all the stories of love and titles, the one of Consuelo Vanderbilt ranks as the most melodramatic and the most tantalizing. In 1952, she wrote an autobiography in which she told of her childhood and her early teen years, through her early marriage to the Duke of Marlborough and her later marriage to Jacques Balsan, a French Military officer. Through it all, the dominant figure was her mother. Consuelo was rigidly guarded from the age of seventeen, having friends, companions, and mere acquaintances supervised and limited so that no one had a chance to influence her in any way. As early as her seventeenth year, her mother apparently had decided that only the Duke of Marlborough would do for her child. Consuelo attended few parties, and those she did, resulted in a rigid catechism as to whom she met, spoke to, or danced with. At eighteen, she received the single proposal of marriage that she wanted to accept, that was from Winthrop Rutherford. However, her mother's guards prevented any communication between them. She was taken to Paris again, and eventually visited Blenheim Palace that year. She noted in recording this period that it was during this visit that the Duke decided to marry her. The Vanderbilts returned to Newport where Consuelo became a virtual prisoner of her mother. When reasoning did not work, her mother resorted to threats, to feigned illness, even to having heart attacks to force her into the marriage. Eventually Consuelo gave in and she and the Duke were married after the newspapers speculated rather crassly as to the extent of her dowry and the type of marriage settlements that would be made. It seems that the Duke knew when to drive a hard bargain and sold his name and title for a tidy sum after extensive haggling.

Shortly after their marriage, the Duke mentioned the fact that he

had given up the girl he really loved in order to marry her. Later Consuelo commented, "I have married you only because I have been forced by my mother to do so."⁹ After eleven years of marriage to the Duke, Consuelo sought a separation and received it. Several years later she finally divorced the Duke and married Jacques Balsan. She was "depicted as a weeping, agonized girl who had been 'sold' against her will by her mother." In 1926, the final episode of this marriage occurred when the Duke decided he wished to have his first marriage annulled in order to marry a Catholic girl. Consuelo set about securing her own evidence in the form of testimony from her former governess, Miss Harper. Eventually her own mother wrote, "I forced my daughter to marry the Duke. I always had absolute influence over her. When I gave an order, nobody discussed it."¹⁰ The annulment was eventually granted and Consuelo and Jacques were also remarried in the Catholic Church to please his family.

In all, marrying a title had distinct advantages as well as disadvantages. However, modern society and social changes leaves this convenient avenue to wealth less useful and certainly less permanent. If anything, the plotting of such marriages still offer romance readers hours of reading enjoyment in their favorite regency novels or historical tales.

NOTES

¹Eliot, Elizabeth, *HEIRESSES AND CORONETS* (McDowell, NY: Obolensky, 1959)

²DeForest, Frances, "Some Americans Who Have Married Titles" *Cosmopolitan*, July 27, 1899, 227-237

³Jones, Emma Garrison, "An American Countess" *Family Story Paper*, January 30, 1886, #643

⁴Kingsley, Charlotte M., "An American Duchess" *Family Story Paper*, November 8, 1899, #1331

⁵Hanshaw, Thomas, "The American Invaders" *Family Story Paper*, December 6, 1902, #1522

⁶Hanshaw, "The American Invaders," Chapter 2

⁷DeForest, "Some Americans Who Have Married Titles"

⁸Eliot, *HEIRESSES AND CORONETS* (cover information)

⁹Balsan, Consuelo, *THE GLITTER AND THE GOLD* (New York: Harper, 1952)

¹⁰Tebbel, John, *THE INHERITORS* (New York: Putnam, 1962) 124

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FRANK MERRIWELL OFF BROADWAY;
OR, ON STAGE IN LEADVILLE, COLORADO, 1898

By E. M. Sanchez-Saavedra

The *Roundup* for October, 1989, contained Fred L. King's fine article, "Frank Merriwell on Broadway." The following may serve as a counterpoint.

In the "Applause" column on pages 33-34 of *Tip Top Weekly*, #154, FRANK MERRIWELL'S GREAT HIT; OR, FIGHTING THE PLAY PIRATES (March 25, 1899), Mr. Albert L. Brown, President of the Tip Top Dramatic Club of Leadville, Colorado, described a play that he had written and produced:

"I take great pleasure in laying before you my play, entitled 'Siberia,' in which Frank Merriwell, the hero of your famous publication, figures as the hero. It was produced for the first time Christmas night (1898) before a packed house at the Lyceum Theatre. It was received with

great applause. The play embraces about 45,000 words, and was written by myself a few months since. The principal part, as enacted by John Kerwin, brought down the house, and the part of 'The Mystery,' by James Blackson, was conceded of great merit by the press of this city. Our club, known as the Tip Top Dramatic Club, have given several public entertainments, which have resulted well financially for the club, but the last one enriched our treasury to the extent of \$167. We remain, as ever, your constant readers."

THE TIP TOP DRAMATIC CLUB

Per ALBERT L. BROWN, President.
Leadville, Colo.

"Siberia," by Albert L. Brown. A melodrama in three acts. As played by the Tip Top Dramatic Club, Dec. 25, Lyceum Theatre. Cast of Characters: Frank Merriwell (a young American), John H. Kerwin; Bart Hodge (his chum), Albert L. Brown; Barney Mulloy (always ready for a ruction), Edmond Boyle; The Czar of all Russia, George Phelps; The Mystery, James Blackson; Carlton Clark (a villain), Harlden Black; Annette (a Russian flower), Miss Marie Gallagher; Rosabell (her friend), Miss Belle Browne. Act I.—New York City by night. A murder. Frank on the scene. Clark appears; the struggle on the bridge. Clark escapes and The Mystery appears. "Who are you?" Act II.—Exterior Royal Palace at St. Petersburg. "Who threw that bomb?" Clark again. "They threw it. I swear it." Frank and Bart arrested. "Your future is Siberia." Act III—The prison in Siberia. Barney and The Mystery appear. The rescue. They escape. "We are trapped!" Annette and Rosabell help them. The Black Gorge. Good-bye. Scene II.—At St. Petersburg again. Frank and Bart prove their innocence. Clark's ending. (Happy denouement).

And so the Eastern "tenderfoot" prep school boy captured Leadville on Christmas, 1898. The question naturally arises as to the whereabouts of Mr. Brown's script. Does a copy yet repose in the old stamping grounds of Deadwood Dick? Did the editor of *Tip Top Weekly* chuckle, shake his head, and drop "Siberia" into the round file? Or, did Gilbert Patten later use portions of it in subsequent Merriwell adventures?

When Gilbert Patten had Frank Merriwell go on the stage as a "super" who quickly rose to star, playwright, and actor/manager, Frank was living out a marvelous wish-fulfilment of his creator's own ambitions. Merriwell's "John Smith of Montana" and "True Blue" were the sort of plays that Patten wrote. Eastern audiences were obviously not as hungry for any sort of entertainment as those in the mining camps, and Patten's career as a playwright never equalled his fictional hero's triumph.

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POPULAR BOOKS AT POPULAR PRICES:

THE RISE AND FALL OF PAPERBACK PUBLISHING IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICA

By Deidre Johnson

The last half of the 19th century witnessed a new phenomenon in publishing in the United States—the rise, proliferation, and failure of inexpensive paperback series. For a brief time, the American public had available an incredible variety of reading materials, all published in paperback, usually at prices ranging from five to fifty cents. While the dime novels of this period have received a fair amount of attention, a second type of paperback series—the paperback libraries—also enjoyed roughly two decades of success and offered a higher quality of reading material than their popular culture counterpart. Sandwiched between the dime novels' two peak periods, the paperback libraries also played an

important part in the paperback boom in 19th century America.

Although the dime novels and paperback libraries were new trends in 19th century publishing, the concepts of papercovered reading material, of cheap adventure fiction at low prices, and of novels reprinted in paper covers had all been introduced in the United States before 1850. In colonial America, religious tracts, government publications, and almanacs were all published as paperbound books (Schick 38). Cheap literature—the adjective describes both the price and the quality—was also in evidence during the 18th and early 19th centuries, in the form of penny chapbooks. These booklets, averaging four to twenty-four pages, contained folk and fairy tales (in essence, hero tales), humor, or miscellaneous non-fiction and were often poorly written and badly illustrated (Haviland & Coughlan 5, 113; Schick 42). Novels briefly appeared, serialized in paperback, in 1835; by 1841 "literary newspapers" such as *Brother Jonathan* were issuing novels as supplements. These lasted until 1845, when postal rates changed, making them less profitable (Schick 49-50). (Others have attributed the failure of the supplements to book publishers who produced "special cheap editions of the same titles, sold at lower prices The book publishers continued to supply these paper-covered books until the newspapers were convinced that serial publication of fiction was more profitable for them" [Hertel 12]).

In 1860, the first dime novel was published, launching a form that continued for the next half century. Usually issued in a 5 x 7 format, running from 64 to almost 200 pages, the early dime novels catered to adults with a predilection for popular fiction, primarily frontier adventures. The stories—tales written especially for dime novels, interspersed with reprints from magazines (and, later, from other dime novels)—were published in a uniform format, under general series titles, such as *Beadle Dime Novels*, or *Frank Starr's American Novels*. By the late 1870s, however, the format, price, and intended audience had begun to change: many dime novels appeared in a 9 x 12 format, with only 16 pages per issue, and sold for a nickel, a price designed to appeal to adolescent readers (Bragin 1860-1928; Bragin 1860-1964 3).

The dime novel format was again altered in the 1880s when the number of pages often increased to 24 or 32 and the front covers were decorated with full-page illustrations. These later dime novels featured frontier tales, detective fiction, war stories, and a potpourri of adventure tales, still designed mainly for an adolescent audience. The popularity of the dime novels decreased through the last quarter of the 19th century, but surged again in the 1890s when color cover illustrations were introduced; the second wave of success was short-lived, and by 1920 the dime novels had disappeared (Bragin 1860-1964).

While dime novels offered popular fiction in inexpensive paperback series as early as 1860, it took another fifteen years for a higher quality of literature to be printed in a similar format. In 1875, Donnelly, Lloyd & Company started the Lakeside Library, an inexpensive paper-covered series featuring uncopyrighted classics (Shove 4). By 1877, at least fourteen paperback libraries were being published (Schick 55). The contents of these libraries were usually uncopyrighted novels—in other words, fiction by English and European authors whose works were not protected by an international copyright law and thus could be pirated with impunity; the format was a quarto edition, set with several columns of type per page; the price, a mere ten cents. Editions could range from 5,000 to 60,000 copies (Shove 6-7).

The paperback libraries continued to flourish in the 1880s, although the format gradually changed from quarto to duodecimo and sometimes even

sixteenmo: the smaller sizes were costlier to manufacture, but more convenient for the consumer; by the late 1880s, most paperback libraries appeared in duodecimo. Towards the end of the decade, some change in contents had also occurred: the libraries included more American works, which were gaining in popularity (Shove 13-14, 35)—partly, one suspects, because so many foreign works were already on the market in a variety of editions.

During the 1860s and 1890s, many types of publishers were trying paperback libraries. American branches of English firms, such as George Routledge & Sons, offered several series; reputable hard-cover publishers also competed for the market (often partly in self-defense, since their hard-cover titles were being reprinted in other publishers' paperback libraries). Some dime novel publishers (most notably George Munro and later Street & Smith) started paperback libraries; a number of new publishing companies also sprang up, each with its own series. Although New York was the center of paperback publishing, followed by Chicago, a number of other cities, such as Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Detroit, and St. Paul, also housed paperback companies.

The paperback libraries' emphasis was originally on "quality" literature, though their contents sometimes offered an eclectic mixture. Munro's Library—a series of 800 volumes—contained such notable works as Charles Dickens's DAVID COPPERFIELD and NICHOLAS NICKELBY, Sir Walter Scott's IVANHOE, George Eliot's MILL ON THE FLOSS and MIDDLEMARCH, and Alexandre Dumas's THE BLACK TULIP and THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO, alongside Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller's DREADFUL TEMPTATION and QUEENIE'S TERRIBLE SECRET, and favorites of the story paper readers, like HER MOTHER'S SIN and MANDOLIN'S LOVER, by "Bertha M. Clay" (Charlotte M. Braeme). [cover]

The paperback libraries began to fade in the 1890s. Some series, such as Street & Smith's Bertha M. Clay Library and Magnet Library, still continued—continued, in fact, until the 1930s, but these were a new type of series, based almost exclusively on popular fiction reprinted from dime novels and story papers. The paperback libraries offering inexpensive editions of more traditional literature had virtually ceased publication by the end of the century.

The short-lived success of the paperback libraries can be attributed to a number of circumstances. During the 1870s and 1880s, a combination of factors made publishing paperback libraries attractive and profitable. The price of paper dropped dramatically after the Civil War (down to 3½¢ per pound for newsprint by 1899) and paper was available in rolls instead of sheets. New manufacturing techniques, such as the folding machine, electrotypes plates, high speed rotary presses, and Mergenthaler's linotype machine, lowered costs and printing time; indeed, a book could be manufactured in as few as ten hours. Low postal rates for paperbacks (2¢ per pound in the 1870s; 1¢ per pound in 1885) made shipping paper-covered novels more economical than clothbound books. In addition, publishers of cheap libraries used uncopyrighted material, usually eliminating payments to authors, and published books which had proven successful in clothbound editions, eliminating the risk associated with unknown authors or novels. The books were distributed not only through regular channels such as bookstores, but also through newsdealers and department stores, reaching a wider audience (Shove 4-8, 23-25, 50; Hertel 17-19). Increased literacy among the American public also helped; in 1880, roughly 31,013,900 Americans could read; in 1890, the figure came closer to 39,353,200 (Hertel 16).

In the 1890s, two events seriously affected publishers of paperback libraries. First, an international copyright law was passed in 1891, severely limiting the supply of uncopyrighted material. (Some material was still available, sometimes through sloppy copyright procedures for a

popular novel, sometimes through previous publication of a title in a magazine which failed to print the copyright notice, sometimes because the copyrights for some popular American authors had expired [Hertel 107-112].) In most cases, however, publishers now had to bid competitively for popular authors, pay royalties, and take risks with untried materials, reducing their profit margins. Then, the economic depression of 1893 brought about more financial difficulties, and many publishers already operating under tight conditions were unable to survive. Their failures, in turn, caused their existing stock to be sold on the market at reduced prices, cutting into the sales of other publishers' titles (Hertel 70-71). In a market already plagued by overproduction (due to large editions and to multiple editions of the same uncopyrighted material by different publishers), many publishers felt the effects of this flood of titles. (The return rates were enormous: in 1883, ten years before the depression, George Munro's popular Seaside Library reported returns of 1,200,000 copies in one year [Shove 16].)

One by one, publishers discontinued their paperback libraries. Some continued to publish inexpensive editions of uncopyrighted classics, but in clothbound editions. Others abandoned the practice entirely. By 1900, the chaotic era of the paperback libraries had ended.

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